

Adecco

Group
Asia



Creating Value From Internship Programmes

An Adecco Asia White Paper

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Introduction

Every year across Asia, thousands of fresh graduates and college students on school break look towards adding to their resumes by securing an internship at a prestigious company. Regardless of how internships are viewed, one thing has always been true – not only can the right internship make a significant difference to a future career – but it can also support organisations to receive new ideas and input.

Unfortunately in the past, interns were sometimes considered to be the ones who did the photocopying, printing, binding, coffee runs, meeting room preparations – basically, the dull tasks that no one else wanted to do. However, times have changed for the better and an internship is no longer about just getting a corporate name on a resume, it is about gaining real world experience and valuable insight into an industry that someone might want to join when entering the workforce.

Internships are also a two-way street, meaning it is not just the intern who gains. Companies with good internship programmes get promising young minds, eager to apply fresh perspective to any business with enthusiasm and gusto! They also get their pick of the best and brightest college interns, ready to build their careers with a company that is willing to help them in that direction.

In Europe, structured internship programmes in countries such as Germany & Switzerland help support lower unemployment and competitiveness.



VALUE FOR THE INTERN

Gone are the days when interns were the lowest rung of the ladder, neither seen nor heard except when a much needed document required copying. Today's interns are on the fast track towards full-time careers in an industry of their choice and companies with the right mentality and approach towards internship programmes get dedicated loyal staff trained in the company standards from day one of their careers.

There are certainly a lot of companies who recognise the importance of a good internship programme. Big name brands like Deloitte, Google, KPMG and ExxonMobil have been praised for offering strong internship programmes. In a Forbes article that listed some of the best internships in 2015, US-based consulting firm Bates White took the number one position. This ranking was based on the fact that their interns from the previous year worked alongside PhD economists, lawyers and MBAs who provided the firm's economic analysis to their clients. The interns got to work with complex databases, perform industry-wide research and create sections of client presentations. Essentially, areas they would do as a full-time employee, thus giving them valuable, real-life experience.

The previous year's number one spot went to BP America, whose interns were allowed to work on projects to develop pipelines and help create ways to harness alternative energy. They explored new energy reserves and tried to develop clean fuels and other products like bio-based engine oil.



“It really comes down to what kind of experience interns want to get and how committed they are to kick-starting their careers,” states Christophe Duchatellier, CEO, Adecco Asia. *“Internships today are so much more comprehensive and fulfilling, but individuals have to consider their goals carefully and be prepared to work hard, because if they don't fight for the internship they want, someone else could get it.”*



NOT ALL INTERNSHIPS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Certainly sometimes there is a down side to internships. The days of ‘getting coffee’ and photocopying or filing are not completely behind us, meaning that there is sometimes grunt work to be done and it sometimes falls to the intern to do it. Having said that, there is a lot less mundane work and a lot more meaningful engagements for today’s interns as compared to decades ago.

Also, unlike in the US, where quality internship programmes have been running for decades, in some parts of the world companies are still paying interns only a nominal amount, which needs to change. Although what it lacks in the pay packet, it more than makes up for in the experience. Interns are now treated like junior executives, taking on responsibilities of full time employees and gaining real world experience. However, there is still some way to go for internships in some parts of Asia. While many companies are providing real work experience, it is through the medium of treating interns like full-time employees. Some companies who are taking cues from their international counterparts and instituting structured programmes to train interns in the intricacies of their industry.

One such example is the Asian Development Bank (ADB), whose internship programmes run three times a year and offers interns the opportunity to work collaboratively on projects with experienced mentors to gain a deeper understanding of development finance and the impact of ADB’s work in the region. So, while still in its adolescence, internships in Asia are quickly becoming a proven way for young professionals to gain truly useful and insightful knowledge into the industries that they wish to become a part of.



BENEFIT FOR CORPORATIONS

While there seems to be no doubt that internship programmes hold numerous advantages for fresh graduates, how can companies benefit from them? In the old days, the answer would have been cheap labour. Today, however, the benefits that interns bring to a company are immense and are certainly not cheap labour.

The most obvious benefit is the ability to recruit new talent. A good internship programme, one that provides a valuable and memorable experience, will attract some of the best and brightest from top universities to join a corporation. Instituting an internship programme is a great way to get eager, passionate, driven individuals to join a company. Organisations get to see some truly talented individuals whom they would otherwise not be able to attract, and they will get them at the start of their careers. While not every intern will be great, a structured programme will allow companies to pick the best of the best and offer them a full time role upon completion of their internship.

It is also not difficult to attract potential new interns. In today's connected world, it will not take long for news of a beneficial programme to reach the eyes and ears of students around the globe. Sometimes all it takes is a single post on Facebook by a millennial for news to go viral. Why would you want college students to be posting about your internship programme on Facebook? Simply because it is low cost advertising/awareness at its very best. This is great for small companies that would otherwise have difficulty attracting interns due to their lack of awareness.

Another benefit can be in the positive influence that interns can have on an environment. As new initiates to the industry and the culture, interns provide fresh perspectives on both the business and the environment. Most of them would not have had work experience and would ask very basic questions on work processes and the business in general. This offers a great opportunity to review and improve workplace efficiency. Having an intern around to inject fresh perspectives can make all the difference in maintaining momentum and ensuring future success.

Interestingly, internships have also been shown to improve productivity among existing staff. For an intern, there is no question of motivation. They are forced to prove themselves and they know they are being judged, either by a grade at the end of an internship or the possibility of full-time employment and are therefore usually highly motivated to perform a variety of tasks. What is interesting is how the existing workforce can be positively affected by the presence of an intern. In many cases, employees will improve their own performance, simply to set a good example and to assist interns who are trying hard to do a good job. Furthermore, these programmes give employers the ideal opportunity to test leadership skills by putting employees in charge of some interns. The responsibility to lead interns on tangible projects or even to act as a mentor will tell employers if that person is ready to take on a larger role in the company.



MAKING AN INTERNSHIP WORK

So what makes for a good internship programme? The first thing to consider is that they have to be built from the ground up. Companies have to consider how interns will fit into their company's processes and work culture. If a company starts an internship programme because it is shorthanded and wants someone to pick up the slack, it might turn into a very unpleasant experience for everyone.



“The main thing that an intern should come away with at the end of a programme is hands on experience in an area that they are interested in pursuing as a career,” states Mark De Smedt, Chief Human Resources Officer, Adecco SA. *“What an intern is generally looking for is the opportunity to put what they have learnt in school or university to practical use and improve their experience and skillset. It is up to the company offering the internship to provide that opportunity. If you can provide that, chances are there will be no shortage of interns to pick from.”*

To make the most of an intern, companies need to keep an open mind with regard to their natural abilities. It is pointless to insist that an intern only stick to what is proscribed to their role when they are showing skills in other areas. Consider their performance and abilities and then assign them to areas where they would have the most success. This requires a certain commitment from the companies to allocate resources in order to develop an intern and assigning a mentor can be a very useful way to assess the intern's capabilities on an ongoing basis. Interns are motivated and curious, and if properly involved, a mentor can easily support their initiatives to fully exploit their potential.

Ideally, about 20-30% of a mentor's time will be taken up with actively teaching/ educating an intern and regular feedback sessions are an important tool to assess the progress of the intern and the projects they working on. “An important thing to remember about interns is that they are new to everything,” states Adecco's De Smedt. “If a company wants the investment into an intern to pay off, they need to provide the right level of guidance and direction.”

Some tips on how to make an internship programme more effective include:

- Having an official welcome for the intern, introducing them to all co-workers
- Ensuring that the intern has a mentor on whom they can rely on to answer questions and provide guidance
- Making the intern part of the team, involving them in team meetings and work events
- Encouraging interns to ask questions (as it is the best way for them to learn)
- Ensuring a consistent level of performance evaluations that offer constructive feedback
- Listen to what interns have to say about their experience, and to provide useful feedback

Adecco's Duchatellier added: “Once an internship programme has been established, it is important that it does not fall into stagnancy. Review the efficiency of the programme and how it is benefitting both the interns and the company. Remember that a programme that interns enjoy will lead to positive experiences that will be shared among peers. This creates a high-value image for the company and will naturally attract the best and brightest to your company”.

Regardless of how one looks at it, either from the company perspective or that of the intern, well thought out and planned internship programmes offer a host of benefits for everyone involved. The interns themselves get a truly insightful and useful experience and the companies get to hand pick the next generation of employees.



The Adecco Asia Network:

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For details of internship programmes with Adecco in Asia, please contact talentasia@adecco.com